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RELIGIONLESS MORALITY.

By OTTO PFLEIDERER,
Berlin, Germany.

THE Society for Ethical Culture, which originated in America, has spread extensively in Europe during the past decade, and counts among its members many men and women, chiefly from the educated middle class, whose moral earnestness and whose zeal for the general welfare are beyond question, but who have become estranged from church life and are convinced that morality should be severed from its past connection with religion, which has proved harmful rather than helpful, and should be put on its own feet. Opposed to them are the representatives of the churches, who assert that in the past history of mankind religion has ever been the basis of morality, and that therefore no other condition is possible in the future; unless the moral order of society is to collapse, it must rest on an absolute authority superior to all human desires and preferences; but such an authority can be found only in the law given by God, which is to be communicated through the church. Thus two diametrically opposed views concerning the very foundations of our entire private and public life confront each other today in open conflict, and the question is forced upon us more and more peremptorily: On which side is the truth? Are the representatives

of the churches right, who insist on basing all morality on their positive and divinely revealed authority? Or are the advocates of "ethical culture" right, who would have all morality emancipated from religion, put on its own feet, and based on human nature alone? Or—as is the case with all great questions that stir an entire age—are truth and error distributed on both sides, so that neither party is wholly right and neither wholly wrong? In that case it would be the task of sober scientific research to sift out truth from error on both sides and to seek the reconciliation of the apparently insuperable antagonism in a higher unity. We shall be disposed in favor of the latter answer, if we consider that a movement like that of the Society for Ethical Culture, which has secured the support of so many and so respectable names among our contemporaries, cannot be wholly causeless, but must have in it some truth, some justification; and that, on the other hand, the representatives of religious morality cannot be wholly in error, when they conclude, from the past historical connection between religion and morality, that there must be some inherent and permanent necessity for this relation. Our task will be, therefore, to show, *first*, where the relative truth and justification lies for the effort to emancipate morality from religious authority; *next*, in what the weakness and error of this tendency consists; *finally*, how the just demands of morality and religion can be reconciled and brought into peaceful concord and harmonious interaction.

I.

At the end of the last century Kant called his age the age of enlightenment, in the sense that men then began to pass from their self-imposed tutelage and resolved to use their own reason: "*Sapere aude!* Dare to use your own mind!" This "motto of the age of enlightenment" has come to be the program for all the movements of our century in science, morality, law, and politics. Humanity, at least in western civilization, has come of age and refuses to walk any longer in the leading-strings of extraneous authority. It refuses to accept anything as true simply because ancient tradition teaches that it is true. It insists

on looking at the world with its own eyes, on investigating and proving everything for itself, and on accepting only what can be clearly and obviously recognized as true in accordance with its own laws of thought. The scientific knowledge of the world owes its tremendous progress during this century to this principle of autonomous thinking, and the results achieved furnish such evident and tangible proof of the correctness of the methods of investigation by which they are obtained that in this domain dissent hardly dares any longer to raise its voice openly. But if reason can autonomously perceive the truth as to what is, why not equally the truth as to what ought to be? If the right to independent thought and investigation is once granted to theoretical reason in matters of science, the same right will have to be conceded to practical reason in matters of will and action; for it is the same reason in both cases, and it has the same world before it: in the one case as the object of knowledge, in the other as the object of action. When man has come to the estate of manhood, he does not care to accept the ethically true or good on mere external authority, but he accepts as good only what is irresistibly commended to him as something that ought to be, by that inward sense which we are accustomed to call "conscience." Blind obedience to extraneous law does not approve itself to us as really moral. Man acts morally only when he does what is good because he is himself convinced that it is good; how he arrived at this conviction is a matter of indifference, if only he is clearly conscious of the obligating demand and yields his inward assent to it. This autonomy of man's moral nature has become a common possession of the civilized world since Kant, though its roots strike farther back, as far as the Reformation. When Luther appealed to his conscience against the authority of the church, and set the personal certitude of faith over against tradition as a higher court of appeal, he asserted the principle of the ethical autonomy of the individual, though his subjection to the letter of the Scriptures hampered him in carrying out the principle consistently. To that extent the modern effort to secure an autonomous morality may be called the direct outcome of Protestantism, and no good

Protestant has a right simply to condemn it and to attempt to bring humanity again under the authority of the church.

When the representatives of this authority assert that the moral law is derived from God, we believe that they are right in their assertion, provided the assertion is understood correctly (this will be discussed more fully later on); but in so far as this assertion usually implies a positive external revelation of divine commandments, the knowledge of which is transmitted to men by the tradition and interpretation of the church, it will have to be admitted that this view is open to the most serious objections. If the knowledge of what is ethically good were transmitted to us only by this external channel, we could never attain to real certainty as to what is good and in accordance with the will of God. For who will guarantee that the men who are supposed to have received a revelation of the divine will in every case understood and communicated that will correctly; that they did not confound their own opinions with divine revelation, or at least so mingle the two that their message cannot be regarded as a pure expression of the divine will? This uncertainty becomes the more distressing when we remember that all the various religions equally claim a divine revelation as the source of their codes—the Brahmins for the laws of Manu, the Persians for the laws of Zoroaster, the Mohammedans for the Koran, exactly as the Jews for the laws of Moses. But there is a wide divergence among these codes, so that they cannot possibly have been all and equally revealed by God. How, then, are we to know which really was revealed by God? We are helpless in the face of this question, unless we have an inward ethical criterion and can test the alleged authorities of the historical religions by that norm. But even if we consent to confine ourselves to the Bible as the only record of a true revelation, we are still in the same plight. For here, too, we are met by very diverse laws and ethical ideals which it is not easy to harmonize. Are we to assume that the ritual precepts of the Mosaic law were revelations of the divine will in the same sense as the moral laws of the decalogue? That the sacrifice of Isaac, the spoiling of the Egyptians, the extermination of the Canaanites with their women

and children, were really commanded by God? That the imprecatory psalms of the Old Testament and the woes against Rome in the apocalypse of John are an ethical standard in the same sense as the Sermon on the Mount or Paul's injunction to be in subjection to the powers that be? All these and similar points give no offense to a historical treatment of the Bible, which takes account of the gradual development of the religious and ethical consciousness in Israel; but for the orthodox view of the Bible as a homogeneous and infallible canon of all religious and moral truth they are exceedingly embarrassing.

And while the Bible contains many things that we cannot acknowledge as an ethical norm, it also fails to contain any instructions on many departments of ethics which are of real importance to us. That is a matter of course about Old Testament legislation, which was intended for the primitive civilization of the small Israelite nation. That deficiency caused the Jewish scribes to supplement the Jewish legislation by their precepts, for which they claimed divine authority equal to that of the written law. Thus the entire public and private life of the Jews was imprisoned in a network of observances, which converted religion into the most external performance of ritual works and stifled the ethical life by an unnatural constraint. Although Christianity broke these bonds and gave play to the freedom of the spirit, yet the same process which had taken place in Judaism was repeated in the church: ecclesiastical precepts and ordinances were elevated to the dignity of a "new law," which was supposed to have had its source in apostolic tradition, or in the continuous revelation of the divine Spirit, and which took equal rank with the canon of the Scriptures as its authoritative interpretation and complement. The priesthood, organized as a hierarchy and early centralized in the Roman bishop, claimed to be in a sense the permanent oracle of the divine will, and sought to control the entire life of western Christendom in conformity with ecclesiastical points of view and in the interests of ecclesiastical ends. As dogma controlled the intellectual life and suppressed free inquiry, so the church by its ethics, its penitential discipline, and canonical law ruled

the entire secular life—the family, industry and commerce, finance, the relation of the social classes, and the politics of the princes. Secular government was to be but the obedient tool of the spiritual powers, as subordinate to them as the moon is to the sun. This system of ecclesiastical world-rule reached its most consistent development in Jesuitism. Jesuit morality recognizes nothing as good in itself; whatever the church commands is good, and it is good because the church, the bearer of all divine authority, commands it. But the church commands what appears advantageous to it and augments its powers, its wealth, its rule in the world.

It is manifest that by this system of ecclesiastical morality the moral personality is stripped of all chance of determining its own ends; when the confessor speaks, conscience must be mute; his oracular dictum supplants individual ethical judgments and feelings; the development of personal conviction and independent character, which alone constitutes the moral worth of man after he has outgrown childhood, cannot and must not be allowed; every awakening of personal judgment at variance with ecclesiastical precept, every striving for a characteristic expression and exercise of a man's individuality, is regarded as revolt against the sacred authority of the church, and therefore against God himself; it is held to be a mortal sin, threatened with temporal and eternal punishment. Society, too, is not permitted to order its life and activities according to its natural needs; it is not permitted to shake off institutions which have been hallowed by the church and are useful to it, though they are antiquated and have become injurious to the common weal, nor to organize its life more adequately in new forms and exercise its forces with greater freedom; every effort for progress and for the reform of intolerable conditions is met by the resistance of the church, which places existing conditions, however corrupt and corrupting they may be, under the ægis of its immutable authority. Thus the moral life, which can thrive and attain to healthy development only in the atmosphere of liberty, is gagged and stifled under the terrible ban of the organized religion of the church; the masses stagnate in ignorance and

superstition, in indolence, poverty, and misery ; the upper classes seek to maintain their rights by allying themselves to the priesthood, but forget their duties to the commonwealth, and decline to a life of pleasure and levity, under whose pestilential breath all ideal efforts sicken ; art and science and social life degenerate to mere show and form, and politics become the arena of conscienceless intriguers. That has ever been the fate of a society whose moral life was enchained by ecclesiasticism. The most striking example in our own day has been the Spanish nation, in which the saying has once again come true : "The years of history are the day of doom."

The Protestant nations have been saved from these evil effects of a rigid ecclesiasticism by the fact that they have admitted the principle of moral autonomy into their religion, at least up to a certain point. It is true, they, too, subject their faith to the positive revelation contained in the Bible ; but as the Bible fortunately contains no definite precepts for the concrete moral conditions of present-day society, Protestants have no decisive authority on ethical questions in the letter of the Bible, but only in its spirit ; but to comprehend the spirit of the Bible, and to apply it to the ethical life according to their best knowledge and judgment, is their recognized right, and is even laid upon them as their duty. Thus the Protestant churches, in spite of holding to the authority of the Scriptures, after all refer their members for guidance to their own convictions, to the judgment of their individual consciences, trained by the spirit of the Bible. To that extent they stand on the basis of modern ethical autonomy, at least in practical life ; and, indeed, the Reformation itself won its most direct and potent successes in the same direction, by liberating the family, society, and the state from the yoke of the Roman church. For this reason the conflict between religion and ethics can never culminate in as sharp an antagonism of principles in Protestant nations as it usually does in Catholic nations. In fact, in the sphere of ethical *practice* that antagonism is hardly ever seriously felt by Protestants. On the other hand, in the sphere of scientific knowledge, the fact that they hold to the traditional doctrines of

the Bible and the church is a stone of stumbling which leads to endless collisions between faith and knowledge. But since the schools, which are the nurseries of knowledge, are institutions of civil society, a clash between ecclesiastical and civil interests is possible at that point, even in Protestant countries, and may lead to the formation of parties and to party conflicts similar to those occurring in Catholic surroundings. However, though Protestant church authorities and clerical parties may occasionally cherish the lust of clerical rule over society and education, this desire never carries so serious a menace, because in the Protestant world there are no powerful organs to secure the satisfaction of the desire. No one can be persecuted in a Protestant state because his convictions differ from the doctrines of the church. Consequently conflicts between faith and knowledge are generally confined to the inner life of individuals; every man is allowed to solve them if he likes and as he likes. Yet, for the individual sore inward struggles and scruples of conscience, which are not without danger in the formation of his moral character, may take their rise at this point. If we bear in mind that the scientific comprehension of the world is one aspect of the moral activity of the mind and follows its own inner laws, and that the striving for truth and the communication of truth to others are a moral duty, we cannot deny that the subjection of the mind to the dogmatic authority of the Bible and the church acts as a check injurious to the intellectual morality of modern men. When we observe the desperate attempts made nowadays by theologians and laymen to harmonize the results of modern natural and historical science with supposed infallible Scriptures, we can hardly avoid the impression that violence is done here to sound sense, that the simple love of truth is darkened, and that honesty suffers damage. But that always to some extent inflicts a moral damage on character. Any man who, for the sake of any religious authority, closes his eyes to the facts, covers over manifest contradictions by sophistical arguments, and persuades himself that he thinks what is unthinkable, certainly is wanting in that inward sincerity, ingenuousness, and truthfulness which are essential to a pure and sterling character. This explains the

not infrequent experience that men whose conscientiousness is without blemish in general secular life feel no scruples about using even dishonest weapons to injure their opponents in ecclesiastical controversies. The wicked old saying, "*Hæretico fides non est habenda*," is still too often found valid in modern churches. And all this is the very natural consequence of the fact that the principle of heteronomy, of the subjection of the mind to a positive, immutable authority, which is retained even by Protestants, at least in the domain of theory, stands in irreconcilable antagonism to the autonomy of the thinking and acting mind, which modern men with entire justice esteem the principle of a true ethical culture. This heteronomy prevails in varying degrees in the various churches; in the Catholic church it embraces the entire life, social and individual, practical and intellectual; in the Protestant churches it is almost entirely restricted to the individual and intellectual life; but in some measure it is ever present in every organized religion, and everywhere works more or less serious damage to ethical culture.

It is apparent from the above in what point we shall have to recognize the relative justification of a non-religious morality; it is the energetic but one-sided reaction of the autonomous moral spirit against the heteronomy of church religion. The more closely religion is linked to church authority, and the more completely spiritual piety and churchly devoutness are identified in the common mind, the more inevitably will religion itself be included in the protest against that form of religion which is embodied in church authority. Because practically religion and ecclesiasticism are always found united, the distinction between the two is overlooked, and religion is combated in championing morality, while really it is only the heteronomy entrenched in the churches which ought to be combated. To combat the latter is the right and the historical mission of the Society for Ethical Culture; its mistake is that it regards religion itself, as well as the heteronomy of the churches, as an enemy of morality, and thus deprives the latter of its most potent ally.

II.

Two questions are of fundamental importance for morality : (1) For what reason should we act morally? What is the ground of our obligation? and (2) For what end should we act morally? Have we any well-founded hope that it will result in anything of value? Wherever these two questions are left without a satisfactory answer, the content of the single moral demands may be ever so excellent, yet the whole edifice is, after all, suspended in the air, and lacks that sustaining foundation which only a comprehensive philosophy of life can furnish. I find a remarkable proof for this in the book on *Ethical Religion* by W. M. Salter, the founder of the Society for Ethical Culture at Chicago. It contains much in its details that is excellent and wins our cordial assent, and yet the total impression is unsatisfactory because these cardinal questions receive only vague, ambiguous, and contradictory answers. To the question concerning the source of the moral law he replies in one place that it is posited in and with the nature of things; again, that it is reason giving expression to itself; then again, combining the two, that moral obligation rests in reason and the nature of things; but finally we are also told that reason in us is only the faculty which recognizes the moral law and not itself the source of the law, because the moral law really has no source, but is a final, uncreated, immutable law, the primitive rock on which the moral universe rests; that no one can state a ground for this highest law, and that no serious man inquires for it. It is plain that these are very diverse answers, the meaning of which is by no means perfectly clear, and the consistent agreement of which is not at all self-evident. Every student of the history of ethics knows what different results are obtained in the construction of the system, according as the nature of things or reason is made the principle; the former leads to the empiric (eudemonist, utilitarian) ethics, the latter to the idealistic ethics, which has found its classical exponent in Kant. It is, of course, not our task now to discuss these different ethical systems; we merely raise the question: Can a satisfactory solution of the cardinal questions stated above be reached by the one way or the other?

If by "the nature of things" we are to understand nature outside of man, we do not see how such a thing as a moral law can be posited in that at all. It is true we speak of "laws" of nature, which we abstract from the observation of natural phenomena by the process of induction. But these "laws" are something totally different from the moral law; they are not demands addressed to a will which can obey or disobey them; they are only a name for the regularity and necessity of the interaction of cause and effect; they are a description, a statement of what actually is and takes place, and not an expression of something that ought to be, but to which reality may, and often actually does, fail to correspond. And if we observe what actually takes place in the sphere of nature which is closest to us, in the animal world, we find there anything rather than moral laws or exemplars. On the contrary, we have learned from Darwin that the all-controlling law in the world of nature is the struggle for existence, the competitive effort of all living beings for self-preservation, and in that pitiless struggle no other right avails aught save the right of superior force or cunning. Of anything moral there is here no trace, therefore this "nature of things" cannot be the source of a moral law. If we pass on to the nature of man, which Salter probably intended to include in that conception, experience at first sight finds here a spectacle precisely similar to that of the animal world, namely, the heedless sway and exercise of selfish passions. Salter concedes this, for he repeatedly says that ethical ideals are not to be drawn from the experience of the actual life and doings of average humanity, because the practice of most men confirms the "law of individual self-interest," rather than the moral law. But if the moral is neither to be drawn from nature below man, nor from human nature, as experience shows it to be, then the assertion that the moral law is given "in and with the nature of things" appears obscure and enigmatic, to say the least.

This is the more the case when we find in addition that Salter rejects the only way which can possibly lead from a naturalistic starting-point to any ethical system—the way of utilitarian morality, because a prudential morality, constructed on the basis

of wisely interpreted self-interest, lags too far behind his moral ideals. He may be quite correct in that, but from his premises his idealism seems inconsistent. But before we follow him farther in his course of thought we must stop a moment to examine utilitarian morality, because it is the system supported by most of the adherents of non-religious morality. It seeks to derive moral precepts from the natural desire of men for individual happiness or well-being, by proving to their reason that the lasting happiness of the individual is so intimately connected with that of the rest that every man will best care for his own welfare by striving at the same time for the welfare of others, and of the largest possible number of others. But in this reasoning the evident fact is overlooked that the welfare of one man is by no means always identical with the welfare of the rest, but often runs counter to it; that the welfare of society demands of its members many sacrifices of personal happiness, the renunciation of personal profit, and under certain circumstances even the surrender of life. Now, what motive is there, from a utilitarian point of view, to impel a man to such sacrifices, to such renunciation of his own desire for happiness? The demand to deny egoism for the sake of the happiness of others can never be deduced from the principle of egoism; all the motives that are deduced from that principle only suffice to modify the exercise of egoism by wise caution and by yielding to circumstances; they will not avail to overcome egoism inwardly. This method will only furnish us prudential maxims for outward action; it will not supply us with moral laws of absolute authority, nor with ideals for the moral character. Salter concedes this, for he says that the sense of obligating authority is the accompaniment only of such moral ideas as bear on goodness, and not of such as bear on happiness.

Does this law, then, which in the face of all natural impulses and desires asserts itself as an absolute "ought," have its source in our reason, as Kant taught? That this answer, too, is insufficient was felt by Salter, for he says in one place that human reason is only the faculty in us which recognizes the moral law, but is not itself the final source of the law, because the moral

law was not made by us, but is independent of our will and our ideas, bearing its authority in itself: "The earth and the stars do not create the law of gravitation which they obey; no more does man or the united hosts of rational beings in all the universe create the law of duty." That is certainly true. The very consciousness that there is a binding law to which we owe obedience implies that we are not the authors of that law, for we cannot be both sovereigns and subjects. A law which is obligatory and binding for all men cannot have been made by men, either collectively or singly, as little as the law of gravitation, which is common to all bodies, was made by those bodies. But what then? Are we to stop short with Salter and rest in the assertion that the moral law has no origin at all, but is something ultimate, for the ground of which no serious mind inquires? But a law is not an entity, but an idea, a demand made on volitional spirits. How, then, can it be conceived as something ultimate and primary, as if it hung suspended above all reality in the void of space? That seems to me an impossible conception, which only proves the perplexity in which Salter is placed; for while he is determined in advance to do without the idea of God, his ethical idealism evidently points him to that idea as the only solution of the enigma.

We find in ourselves, as the fundamental moral fact, the consciousness of duty, the "I ought"—absolute, independent of all our personal desires, and totally distinct from any extraneous compulsion. That is the one constant element in all the movements of our conscience. The form of our consciousness of duty remains ever the same, however diverse and variable the content and scope of duty may be. It is a demand which is addressed to our will, and which makes itself felt as the expression of another and commanding will. But as soon as we feel this demand of duty, we realize also a constraint, which we cannot escape, to acknowledge the rightfulness of the demand. It is this *inward* constraint to acknowledge the rightfulness of the moral demand which we call "the sense of moral obligation." Precisely that constitutes the distinctive character of the consciousness of duty as distinguished from mere prudential

maxims on the one hand, which carry no absolute imperative with them; and from external coercion on the other hand, which carries with it no inward acknowledgment of the rightfulness of the demand. Now, if in the moral imperative the demand of another will whose right to command we spontaneously acknowledge makes itself known, then that fact presupposes two others: first, that the will expressed in the moral imperative is *superior* to ours, for otherwise it could issue no commands to us; but, also, that it is not wholly alien from our will, but in some respects is *one* with it, for otherwise we could not feel inwardly bound by it; we could not acknowledge the rightfulness of the demand it makes on us. In other words, the moral law commands us to adopt ends for our volitions and actions which are absolutely superior to our personal desires, and which contain a universal good, valuable for its own sake. But if these higher and universal ends were entirely foreign to our own will, we could never adopt them as the content of our own volition, nor acknowledge their right to be realized, because the will can acknowledge and adopt as its own only such ends as find a basis in its own nature, are germane to and consonant with its life-purpose. The ends marked out for us by the moral law may, therefore, be superior to our own personal ends, but they must include and not exclude them. Accordingly we shall have to recognize in the moral law the ends of a will which towers infinitely above ours, and which is yet as essentially one with ours as the life of an organism is one with the life of its several members. Now, this will, which is at once above us all and in us all, infinitely superior to our finite determinations, and yet so closely akin to us that we feel that we are spirit of his spirit—what is this will but God? Only in him, in the holy will of the absolutely good, can the ultimate ground of all moral obligation be found. The autonomy of our moral and spiritual nature, so far from being incompatible with “theonomy,” rather finds therein its firmest stay and final foundation. The reason why Salter so stubbornly refuses to accept this conclusion, which he yet approximates so often himself, is the fear that the recognition of “theonomy” will destroy the moral autonomy of man. But that is only a prejudice growing

out of that same unspiritual and un-Christian conception of God as an alien and extraneous sovereign which he condemns so severely in religion. If he entertained a worthier conception of God, such as Christianity by its noblest teachers has inculcated—the conception of God as the holy will of love, who is above us and in us, whose children we are, spirit of his spirit, and in whom we live and move and have our being—it would immediately become evident that the inward revelation of this holy spirit in our moral and religious consciousness does not destroy its autonomy, but establishes it. Theonomy is not identical with heteronomy; on the contrary, it is the surest guarantee, the strong fortress, of our personal freedom against all servitude of man. Even Seneca said: “*Deo parere libertas est.*” And the apostle Paul writes: “We have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: Abba, Father!” “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 3:18). And in John we read: “If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). The entire New Testament, from the Sermon on the Mount to the second epistle of Peter, is full of this idea: that as children of God we are partakers of the divine nature, and that the surrender of our will to the divine will is not the entrance into bondage, but into true freedom. We hear the echo of the same glad tidings in all the writings of the reformers, who discovered in faith, that is, in the surrender of the heart to the holy love of God, “the freedom of a Christian man,” the power to overcome the world and to break all the fetters of bondage to man. In short, theonomy and autonomy are not incompatible; they are rather the two sides of the same truth. The same fact which is called autonomy when we contemplate its human and psychological phenomena is theonomy when viewed in its metaphysical ground.

As the first cardinal question of ethics, the question concerning the ground of our moral obligation, finds an adequate solution only in God, so also the second cardinal question, the question for the guarantee of the attainableness of our moral ends in the world. If the moral law had its final source only in our human

reason, or in "the nature of things," we should have no safe guarantee whatever that our moral ends can be realized in the world. What begins as a subjective thought of human reason may well end as a mere pious desire and beautiful dream, the realization of which would be hopelessly wrecked against the hard necessity of the actual world. "The nature of things," as it presents itself to the sober view of the realist, is so far removed from our moral ideals, and so often opposes its hostile resistance to our moral aims, that the contemplation of it is calculated to paralyze our moral courage rather than strengthen it. Ethical idealists have always felt that, and even if they saw no such necessity to secure a higher ground for the moral obligation of man, they have at least felt compelled to "postulate" a higher power, supplementing our own impotence in order to guarantee the attainment of our endeavor. We remember Kant's postulate of a God to assure the highest good, or to harmonize the antagonism, insuperable to us, between the world of sense and the moral world, between happiness and virtue; or Fichte's postulate of a moral order of the universe, in which the victory of good is guaranteed. But we must not forget that such postulates rest on a weak foundation as long as the ground of morality is sought in men and not in God. For who gives us the right to demand that a higher power must put itself at the service of our purely human ends? If there is such a higher power, we may presume that it will realize its own ends, and not lend itself as a servant to alien ends. Unless human ends coincide with its own, it will be as indifferent to them as the Epicurean gods. But in that case we have no right to expect any help from it, and hopelessly face a hostile world with our own impotence. If, on the other hand, we believe that our true moral ends are not of our own devising, but have been set for us by God; that they are his own eternal purposings, for which he seeks temporal realization in us and through us, then it is not a mere "postulate" with us, but a self-evident certainty, that the God who worketh in us to will will also work in us to do and to accomplish; that he has not only set us the task of laboring in his kingdom of goodness in the world, but that he lends us the power to accomplish that task,

and orders and guides the facts of life and the course of the world in such a way that all things must serve and promote the achievement of the supreme divine and human end, the coming of his kingdom. It will have to be conceded that this view of life and the world is coherent and clear, while the theory which has so generally prevailed since Kant, according to which religion is to be added to a merely autonomous (not also theonomous) morality as a "postulate" to supplement and round it off, is a self-contradictory and untenable hybrid of belief and unbelief.

All this applies especially to Salter's book, to which reference has been made. We note there a remarkable ambiguousness on this point. He says that the religious men of the future, who have abandoned belief in God, providence, and eternal life, and believe only in their duty, will none the less cherish their dreams of perfection without doubt or fear; they know that they are under a higher and stronger protection than any they could devise; that the holy powers which no one can name hold and encompass them; that if there is in them aught of worth, it will survive, and so on. These words do indeed give expression to the same tendency which forms the content of the Christian belief in providence, and which finds its classical expression in the words of the apostle Paul: "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). But is it a mark of progress in religious insight and clearness, when the religious men of the future, instead of sharing the apostle's faith in the omnipotent sway of the God whom we love and by whom we believe we are loved, are to put their trust in "holy powers whom no one can name"? Or when, as Salter expresses it in the same connection, they bow, not before men and not before God, but before "something so mysterious and necessary that without it the stars would disappear from the heavens and human society would sink back into chaos"? How are we to put our trust in powers so inscrutable and mysterious that no one can name them, of whom, therefore, we cannot know if they feel any concern for us and our human welfare and goodness, nay, whether they have any thoughts or purposes at all, or are merely the blind necessity of fate, the inflexible law of the unpurposing

mechanism of nature? If this ethical religion of the future is to bow only before the mysterious "necessity," without which the stars would disappear from the heavens, it really does not rise even above the heathen belief in fate, above which even Socrates and Plato had risen to the God of wisdom and beneficence. And how little of comfort and encouragement such a faith in the mysterious powers of necessity or fate contains Salter might learn from every tragedy of Æschylus and Sophocles, in which man, with his moral claims, is set face to face with the fearful powers of fate, and bows before them, indeed, but in despairing resignation and not in hopeful trust. And the same sad strain of the fearful law of necessity runs through all the wisdom of India, and, in fact, through that of all the decadent ancient world. Hence its pessimism, its weariness of the world, its yearning for salvation. But salvation came when, instead of the unknown God and the dark world-powers (Acts 17:23; Gal. 4:8), the God of the gospel was proclaimed, who is spirit and light and love; whom we may call our Father, because we are spirit of his spirit and ordained to be conformed to his image; whom we may love because we know we are loved by him; whom we may trust because we have been called to share with him the work of salvation in redeeming the world and making it holy. If the ethical religion of the future expects to replace this evangelical faith in God by the faith in mysterious, unnamable powers of necessity, I can see no progress in that, either in theory or in practice, but on the contrary a relapse to the pre-Christian stage of the ancient philosophy of life. The same dualism of ethical ideals on the one side, and of a soulless and heartless naturalism and fatalism on the other, which then crushed the best minds and paralyzed their courage in life and their joy of work, would renew its baleful reign with that religion of the future.

Salter and his friends charge the Christian faith in providence with making men indolent, because they expect God to act for them, instead of acting for themselves. But this rests on a misconception of true religious faith, to which some who seek in religion an excuse for their moral indolence occasionally may give color. For true religiousness, however, faith in the

providential care of God has ever been, not a pillow of ease, but a motive and feeder for the most energetic moral exertion. For the religious man does not imagine that God realizes his ends by miraculous intervention direct from heaven. He knows that God's activity in the moral world is everywhere mediated by human organs. He knows, too, that he himself is called to the work in God's service according to the kind and measure of the powers given him. The consciousness of being an ally and fellow-worker with God, the Lord of the universe, furnishes him with a buoyant energy of immense force, with a courage that tramples on impossibilities. And since he regards all his powers and means as gifts of God, meant to accomplish tasks of corresponding magnitude in the service of the divine household, he feels responsible, as a steward of God, for the faithful use of the talents intrusted to him. Thus religious faith in providence does not issue in indolence, but in a quickened sense of responsibility and of obligation to exert all powers in faithful work. We may assert that nothing so deepens the seriousness of conscience as the religious contemplation of life, when its duties are accepted as tasks set by God; its blessings and joys as gifts of God; its evils and woes as provings by God; and, on the other hand, every neglect of duty and every wrong done is felt as guilt against the Lord of the world, as disloyalty to the holy God and gracious Father. I do not believe that any morality divorced from religion, be it utilitarian or idealistic, can possibly have at its command ideas that would equal the immense motive energy of this religious view of the world and of life, to say nothing of excelling it. And not only motives, but sedatives; not only reasons impelling to action, but others nerving to endurance and silence; comfort and cure for the sick and suffering soul of man, are offered by religion, in ways for which there is no substitute. When the noblest endeavors suffer shipwreck against the resistance of an apathetic world; when the most strenuous toil in the service of the good cause appears to be fruitless and is rewarded only with ingratitude; or when the willing worker finds his own powers failing and is forced to stand idle when he longs to work; how easily then does a man, if he

is centered in himself alone, grow faint of heart and embittered; he withdraws wearily from the stress of life and fortifies his dreary soul against the miseries of his fate with the defiant resignation of stoic apathy. The religious man knows even then that he is not forsaken. He seeks comfort with his God, wrestles with him in prayer to gain new blessings and strength, and hears in the depth of his soul the comforting words: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is perfected amid weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). And when man has weakly strayed from the straight path; when he is lost in the maze of selfishness and love of the world, and sinks prostrate under the weight of his own guilt, then morality surrenders him to the inexorable judgment of those fateful powers of whom the poet says:

To earth, this weary earth, ye bring us,
To guilt ye let us heedless go,
Then leave repentance fierce to wring us:
A moment's guilt, an age of woe!

(GOETHE'S *Wilhelm Meister*, Carlyle's trans.)

But the religion of redemption takes the lost one by the hand and leads him back to the house of his Father, and lets him find peace and new salvation at the heart of the everlasting love, which is able to overcome even sin and guilt, and to transform lost sinners into new men and children of God.

III.

Morality, then, cannot take the place of religion. If in frigid self-sufficiency it seeks to sever its pristine connection with religion, it robs itself of its own firm stay and the well-spring of its power. But neither can religion dispense with morality. It must let the current of its force pour out into active life, and in turn receive back a current of air and light, freedom and clearness; otherwise it will waste away and decay, and become a curse to men instead of a blessing. For the idea, so prevalent today, that men can choose whether they will have religion or not, is false. Religion has us and will not let us go. It is one of the essential elements of human life, which no power in the world can eradicate. Every attempt to ignore or to isolate this most potent of all the forces in the historical evolution of

our race; every attempt to exclude it from the interaction of all the forces of our intellectual and ethical life, could have only one final result: religion would fall a prey to the nether, sinister powers of human nature and would drag down all the other powers of the mind in its ruin. It is, therefore, in the interest of religion, as well as of morality and science and civilization in general, that the vital connection and interchange of influence between the two be maintained intact.

Religion is the immediate consciousness that our life is bound to the higher power which governs both us and the world, and ordains and defines our relation to the world in which it has placed us. A consciousness that we are bound, I say; and I mean by that the dependence of our existence and welfare, as well as the duty to subject our volitions and actions to that sovereign power, which is realized as a volitient power by the very fact that it obligates our will. The bond which unites us to God in religion is deeper and stronger than any other, because it goes back to the ground of our existence, and every ethical relation, every social tie, among men has its transcendental root in this religious relation, in the common bond which unites all members to the divine power that encompasses their lives and correlates their aims. Thus religion from the outset has an ethical direction; the feeling of reverence, duty, and trust, which unites men to their deity, is transferred to the social relations of children to their parents and ancestors, of citizens to their nation and sovereign, and invests these relations with their moral sanction to bind the consciences of men.

But because the consciousness of God contains the all-inclusive unity superior to self and to the world, therefore it is always affected and defined by the quality and content of the self-consciousness and world-consciousness. According as a man conceives of himself and the world, so will he conceive of his God too. It is natural, therefore, that in the stage of humanity's childhood, and also in the childhood of individuals, when consciousness is limited by the world of sense, the consciousness of God and of his relation to us should usually be very low and sensually phantastic. Poetic imagination does not really create

the idea of God, for that is an *a priori* content of our reason, though, perhaps, but a vague intuition. But imagination does embody this unconscious idea in the concrete form of a vivid conception, so that it becomes a clearly defined object of religious knowledge and action. This conceptual image is taken by imagination from the accumulated store of experiences as it lies ready to hand in consciousness. Now, since man in the stage of childhood does not yet conceive of himself as spirit, but as a sensual being alike in kind to nature that surrounds him, he cannot at first conceive of the deity except as a sensual and natural being, which excels him and other creatures of which he has experience only by subtler senses, greater powers, and longer life, but otherwise shares his own natural needs, desires, and passions, and demands of its worshiper service and offerings corresponding to these needs. Religion was carried beyond this gross and primitive stage of naturalistic conceptions and ceremonies by the development of ethical self-consciousness and theoretical world-consciousness among the nations that entered on the career of civilization and culture. When by the common life of the tribe the first rudiments of a stable reign of law were evolved, and when a regular order came to be recognized in the external world, in the course of the stars and the recurrence of the seasons, the gods were held to be the founders and guardians of this twofold order. But as custodians of the right they became the friends of the righteous and ensamples of all that was esteemed worthy and noble among men. This process of filling the conception of God with ethical contents was a gradual one and made headway only amid constant conflict with the naturalistic forms of conception, which held their ground tenaciously. Hardly anywhere in the pre-Christian history of religion was the latter element completely extruded and the ethical ideal wrought out purely. An undefined blending of the naturalistic and ethical elements everywhere prevailed in religious conceptions and ceremonies. Even the religion of Israel, in spite of the lofty ideals of the prophets, retained a considerable remnant of heathenism in the cult of its temple and its sacrifices. Christianity was the first to commit itself to thoroughgoing work in this matter

of formulating a purely ethical conception of God and ejecting all naturalistic elements, by teaching men to conceive God as the perfectly good Spirit or as holy love. Here too, as everywhere in the pre-Christian history of religion, progress in the knowledge of God was linked to progress in ethical self-consciousness, to a profounder realization and valuation of personal ethical qualities.¹

But while it is certain that Christianity as a principle rose to a purely ethical idea of God and to a corresponding worship of God "in spirit and in truth," we must not overlook the fact that by the very constitution of human nature it was impossible that all Christians individually should attain to this level and that all generations should maintain it equally. The naturalistic form of thought is too deeply rooted in our nature to be overcome at one stroke and finally. Every generation had to face it as the enemy that had to be fought incessantly and ever anew. Moreover, its power was so immensely augmented by the mass of pagan customs that poured into the church at the conversion of heathen nations that we can easily understand how the gold of Christian truth came to be alloyed with much of baser metal in the development of ecclesiastical doctrine and practice. Heathen philosophy forced its way into the doctrine of God (trinity); the expiatory system and magical rites of the pagan mysteries forced their way into the worship of the church (sacraments); and when sacrifice and magic returned, the priesthood with its monopoly of grace returned too. And all this led to that distortion of religion in external ecclesiasticism, with its train of evil ethical consequences, which we discussed above. The tendency to sensualize the spiritual and to naturalize the ethical is but too deeply seated in human nature, and at the bottom it is this which ever clings to religion like a weight of lead, clogs its ascent to the ideal, and from heights once attained drags it down again and again to lower levels.

How can this hereditary evil, this *vitium originale* of our race, which has wrought such an infinitude of harm, be cured? By

¹ For a fuller exposition of this process of development in the history of religion I refer to my *Religionsphilosophie*, 3. Auflage, 1896.

ignoring religion, and fancying in self-sufficient pride of culture that there is nothing to be gained and nothing to be feared from religion? This opinion is very prevalent nowadays, but it is none the less a short-sighted and pernicious error. If religion is discarded by the cultured classes and left to be the toy of the masses, it will inevitably run wild and be lowered and coarsened. The spiritual content of its symbolisms will be covered and hidden by their sensual forms. These forms themselves will become grosser, more ponderous, calculated only for the sensual effect on the masses. The ethical ideals will be supplanted by the selfish and sensual desires that seek satisfaction in the ceremonial of worship. The fear felt by the natural man in the face of the beyond, the invisible, the unknown, will be unchecked and ungoverned by any ethical and rational culture, and will become the lever by which priestcraft will sway and fanaticize the masses. Thus religion degenerates into superstition, and the demoralizing power of superstition threatens destruction to every civilization, whether the destruction come slowly by wasting disease, or suddenly by revolutionary explosions. Therefore it is my conviction that those who desire the sound and steady development of the culture of modern society can make no greater mistake than to dissolve its connection with religion, and thus at the same time to condemn religion to congeal into superstition, and to rob morality of the most efficient and indispensable source of its power. The very opposite, the most intimate connection, the most vigorous interchange of influences between religion and ethics, is demanded in the interest of both sides, and is, in fact, nothing less than the fundamental condition of the future progress of our race.

Religion must ever anew measure its inherited ideas and customs against the standard of the ethical ideal, and in so far as they do not harmonize with that, it must strive after their purification and progressive development. That is not to say that strict scientific exactness can ever be demanded of its forms of teaching—that is impossible, because the transcendental relations of religion can never be expressed save by symbols, that is, by forms only approximating to the facts expressed—but only that it

may justly be demanded that its teachings shall not conflict with what has been established as theoretical or practical truth, and especially that it shall not lag behind our ethical ideals. As to how much of the received ecclesiastical dogma, and especially of the popular faith of the church, would demand correction in accordance with this canon—to investigate that would far exceed our present limits. But as to the method of this critical process I beg permission to add a remark. We must not imagine that such an improvement of existing forms of belief or worship can be secured suddenly, say by the majority vote of a synod, or by act of government. Every attempt of that kind would work more harm than good, for it would either awaken the resistance of the masses, which might easily flare up into fanaticism; or it would root up the wheat with the tares; it would convulse and imperil faith along with superstition, for both are closely intertwined in the heart of the people, and in outward form they are often much alike. Commands and edicts within the church are just as undesirable as rupture with it or attack upon it from without. There is only one method that attains its ends: to remain within the church and to utilize its existing forms, but to labor without ceasing to make the ethical element supreme in faith and worship, and all the rest but a serviceable means to that end; to interpret and apply the forms of doctrine and the ceremonial of worship in such a way that the ideal motives, which in fact underlie them, are clearly and consciously understood and made operative upon the hearts of men, while anything which clings to them and is susceptible of misunderstanding is either silently set aside or corrected by sober discussion. It is true, this is not an easy task. It requires more patience, more humility, more self-denying love, and more pedagogic wisdom than is dreamed of by those who naïvely imagine that they can overthrow the walls of Zion by the trumpet-blast of their anti-religious polemics!

The more religion is thus steadily purified, spiritualized, and deepened in its ethical aspects, the more certainly will it exert the most salutary influence on the ethical life and culture of individuals and nations. It makes conscience keener and more insistent by presenting moral duties as divinely given tasks, and

the violation of duty as guilt against God. In general it furnishes us with the highest standard for our critical judgment of ourselves by placing before us as a norm the perfect will of the holy and all-knowing One. It spurs on to moral activity by the consciousness that we are responsible stewards of God's gifts and workers in God's kingdom. It invigorates our courage in the battle with the adversities of life by the certainty that all the universe cannot harm one who is an ally of the lord of the universe. It saves us from arrogance in prosperity and from discouragement in misfortune, by accepting both as sent by God to serve for our self-discipline, for the purification and strengthening of our character. Furthermore, religion, by binding all men to God, is the strongest bond of all social relations; the duties of family life and of citizenship in community, state, and personal calling receive from religion their sanction, the significance and importance which lay them with obligatory force upon the conscience. It does not, like the ecclesiastical hierarchy, desire to rule the life of the world by external force, and to keep the family and the state, art and science, under its tutelage; the ethical spirit justly reacts against such an attempt; but it does desire to render to society the most valuable service by overcoming selfishness and implanting in the hearts of men love, the unselfish devotion to the common weal, the self-sacrificing enthusiasm for noble aims, the faithful endurance in doing and suffering for the cause of goodness. The more this spirit prevails in a nation and inspires the actions of individuals in the various callings of life, the firmer will be the foundation of culture and prosperity, and the easier will it be to overcome the dangers with which society is threatened by the errant spirits from the deep that demand a false, because godless, autonomy, a license undisciplined by law and order. There is only one salvation from this false liberty: the true liberty, which is bound in God; the autonomy which is also theonomy; in short, a morality which is allied to religion and founded on religion.